United Nations A/56/PV.41

General Assembly

Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

41st plenary meeting
Thursday, 8 November 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 23 *(continued)*

United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/523)

Draft resolution (A/56/L.3)

Mr. Sun Joun-yung (Republic of Korea): Allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for preparing the draft resolution entitled "Global agenda for dialogue among civilizations" (A/56/L.3). I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for preparing a succinct yet informative report, and his Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, for his tireless efforts to promote the spirit of dialogue among civilizations. In particular, we commend him for launching yesterday the book entitled *Crossing the Divide: Dialogue among Civilizations*, the fruits of a two-year collaborative effort undertaken by 18 members of the Group of Eminent Persons.

Last year we ushered in the new century with great confidence and high expectations for the years to come. This optimism derived from the anticipation that, with the end of the cold war, barriers among nations would erode and economic prosperity would spread around the globe, aided by the information technology revolution and the onset of globalization.

The reality, however, is that the benefits of globalization and the information revolution have been unevenly distributed throughout the world. In addition, thanks to rapid advances in telecommunications technology, different civilizations now interface more frequently than ever before, but this generally occurs in an asymmetrical manner. Such developments have inevitably produced side effects, which may shed more light on the economic disparities and diverse perspectives that exist among various regions belonging to different civilizations.

Rather than allow the information technology revolution and globalization to drive a wedge between civilizations, the international community should take advantage of their potential to enhance contact among diverse groups. To do so, we should devise a normative framework that would foster the spirit of tolerance and understanding through expanded contact among people.

In this context, the Government of the Republic of Korea appreciates all the initiatives taken by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1998. We believe it would be a very welcome and fitting step to adopt the draft resolution on the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations during the very year the United Nations has designated for such dialogue.

Looking back upon a succession of recent conflicts, it becomes evident that many conflicts can be attributed to a lack of communication and consequent misunderstandings between different groups, be they

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

01-62644 (E)

national, ethnic or religious. However, we need to beware of those who exploit such differences and diversity for political purposes, particularly those who espouse hatred under the guise of safeguarding civilization. Those are the people who draw fault lines between civilizations. To prevent such fault lines from becoming more deeply inscribed, dialogue among civilizations should be more vigorously encouraged in the future.

In conducting such dialogues, no one can deny that a spirit of tolerance and an acceptance of diversity are essential. Unless guided by the spirit of tolerance, increased contact among people in the era of globalization might arouse fear of those who are different. If left unchecked, such fear can turn into hatred. In this regard, dialogue among civilizations has become all the more important in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September.

As indicated in the preambular part of the Global Agenda, we should not lose sight of the fact that interaction among civilizations has enriched humanity throughout history. In fact, rich diversity among the world's civilizations can and should be an asset and a stimulus to mutual development, rather than a source of conflict.

Although an acceptance of diversity and a spirit of tolerance are essential ingredients in any dialogue among civilizations, we cannot deny the existence of certain universal values. These universal values are the embodiment of the collective wisdom, insights and experiences emanating from different civilizations over the course of humankind's long history. In some sense, they provide fertile soil in which diverse seeds from different civilizations can together be planted and encouraged to flourish. At the same time, my delegation would like to stress that dialogue does not mean appeasement of the arrogance of power or of the blind courage of ignorance. Rather, dialogue should be based on the fundamental principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

In this context, my delegation believes that the United Nations serves as a unique forum where a broad array of civilizations, represented by Member States, can pursue dialogue, accepting diversity as well as universal values. We appreciate the efforts that the United Nations system, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has made so far to foster dialogue among civilizations. Furthermore, we believe that long-term projects promoting dialogue and tolerance in the fields of education and culture should be further encouraged throughout the United Nations system. While we recognize that the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations will come to an end in less than two months, we hope that the momentum gained throughout the Year will be sustained and revitalized in the years to come.

Having consecutively inherited Buddhist and Confucian civilizations in the past, and more recently elements of a Christian culture, the Korean people consider themselves well equipped to engage in a dialogue among civilizations on the basis of their enriched cultural and spiritual heritage. Indeed, the Korean Government held a successful seminar on dialogue among civilizations in Seoul last year, in cooperation with UNESCO.

The Republic of Korea looks forward to making more constructive contributions to the cause of dialogue among civilizations in the years to come.

Mr. Moushoutas (Cyprus): The Charter of the United Nations considers dialogue to be a means of harmonizing international relations and resolving differences among States. It places dialogue at the highest peak of human endeavours, for the promotion of peace and the solution of international problems. The item under consideration aims at these lofty goals, as well as at strengthening the bonds within and among civilizations, emphasizing the common destiny of humankind. Promoting cooperation, interchange, tolerance and understanding among peoples, and coexistence among countries, cultures and religions, is not only a good policy; it is also an imperative choice for survival.

Our societies and our cultures are not, and cannot be, isolated entities. A local crisis in a place far removed from our borders or shores unfailingly and immediately affects us all. We are part, it seems, of the same global village, where our actions or omissions, our deeds or misdeeds, are affecting everyday life everywhere. And here lies the contradiction of our present day: instead of drawing closer to each other in this interdependent world, we continue to experience much conflict and human misery from segregation, separation and divisions.

The twentieth century has been marked more by rivalry than by cooperation. It has been rightly

observed that the majority of conflicts in which United Nations peacekeeping operations take place are based on ethnic, tribal or religious grounds. Separatism, especially militant separatism, forms one of the root causes of conflicts in our world. As the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations has said,

> "Just as, during the 1990s, many who went to war used the threat of diversity as a justification for conflict, perhaps in the future those who seek peace will use the spirit of dialogue among civilizations as a means to move forward". (*A/54/546, annex, para. 14*)

Common sense dictates that the calamities we have brought upon ourselves should be avoided, and that peace and cooperation should replace confrontation and conflict. To achieve that goal we must institutionalize dialogue among peoples of different cultures and civilizations. As the Secretary-General notes,

> "It is the perception of diversity as a threat that is at the very origin of war." (*A/55/492, para. 4*)

The many positive and mutually beneficial interactions among civilizations and the mutual enrichment of civilizations must be cultivated and form the basis of educating the young, especially children. We are all part of creation, linked by common destiny and facing a challenging future. It is time for the beauty of integration and peaceful coexistence through diversity to be promoted and further addressed. Tendencies to portray specific cultures as threats to peace must be rooted out of our teaching and schoolbooks.

In this United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, we celebrate the unity and diversity of mankind. We agree that our survival ultimately depends on our success to promote tolerance as the accepted mode of behaviour, despite the obstacles of intolerance and aggression. Again, let us not forget Mr. Picco's words:

> "History does not kill. Religion does not rape women, the purity of blood does not destroy buildings .... Only individuals do those things."

It is through dialogue that my Government is committed to solve the problem of Cyprus. We strive for a peaceful solution through which the two communities on the island may live in peace and harmony, as they did for centuries in the past without occupation troops and barbed wire.

It is with those thoughts in mind that we have again co-sponsored draft resolution A/56/L.3, which was pioneered by the Islamic Republic of Iran and also co-sponsored by a great number of Member States representing every regional group. It contains all the elements for promoting dialogue among different civilizations. It underlines the importance of inclusion and the enhancement of mutual understanding and provides a programme of action for cultural, educational and social events by Governments, regional groups and non-governmental organizations.

In that regard, we commend the initiative of the visionary and wise President of Iran, Mr. Mohammad Khatami. To the members of the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations, which undertook the heavy task of promoting this lofty cause within the United Nations, we extend our deep appreciation, while we welcome among us the Group of Eminent Persons.

Mr. Kerim (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): The decision of the General Assembly contained in its resolution 53/22, of November 1998, to proclaim the year 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations was undoubtedly wise and most appropriate and, as such, well received across the world.

It is not only the conceptual underpinnings of the dialogue among civilizations embodied in diversity and tolerance that justify the presence of this topic on the agenda of the United Nations; it is more than that. It is the need to mark the beginning of the third millennium of mankind with a great cross-fertilization of cultures, to use an expression from the charter of the Académie Universelle des Cultures in Paris, adopted when that multinational organization of artists and scientists was established a few years ago.

Being in New York one does not need to undertake a journey in order to convince oneself of this true and visionary assessment. Here in New York we see a reorientation of the melting pot concept in practice. Perhaps it would be better to say that a cross-fertilization of cultures exists: different cultures living shoulder-to-shoulder. Some ethnic groups have merged with one another, others have kept themselves separate — living in different districts, speaking different languages and following different traditions.

Yet all come together on the basis of some common laws and a common lingua franca, English.

Without even wanting to speculate about the real intentions of the perpetrators of the assault on 11 September in lower Manhattan, one might think of an attempt to challenge these values and way of life. Watching the replay of the cataclysmic pictures of the collapsing World Trade Center Towers, one could ask, Where is civilization heading? Will barbaric acts of terrorism provoke the opening of new gaps among people, nations and religions or widen already existing ones?

In order to prevent dissension along the worldwide front, one thing must be clear in the decisive battle against terrorism: no religion, people or region should be targeted. However, the main goal must not be compromised, namely, to subdue international terrorism.

As the Secretary-General aptly pointed out in his report,

> "A dialogue among civilizations is not only a necessary answer to terrorism — it is in many ways its nemesis. Where terrorism seeks to divide humanity, the dialogue aims to unite us." (*A/56/523, para.19*)

On the other hand, we have to be aware of the fact that the world we live in is far from perfect. Some people believe there is a struggle between globalization and cultural diversity. Other people fear they will be left behind in this great global process. These fears are not groundless.

Recognizing these fears, political leaders, as well as international organizations, including the United Nations, have realized that we cannot hand over the world to market forces alone. Recently addressing the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), French President Chirac said,

(*spoke in French*)

> "Cultural diversity is the way to counter the standardization of cultures produced by globalization. Diversity must be based on the conviction that each people has a specific message to the world, that each people can enrich humanity by contributing its share of beauty and truth."

(*spoke in English*)

With such an approach in mind, we would like to emphasize that globalization cannot be separated from democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, individual liberty, social justice, respect for different groups and communities and respect for cultural identities.

This implies that, if globalization is to be governed by global principles of ethics and democracy, it is necessary to follow a course that leads to no other destination but worldwide progress. It is therefore the duty of political leaders and all other people in positions of power to civilize the process of globalization to ensure that the interests of people — of all people — prevail.

Examples are the best means of conveying a message in a convincing manner. In terms of the scope of the dialogue among civilizations and its worldwide dimensions, allow me to cite some examples. Is it not a common challenge for all societies, regardless of their religious background, cultural roots or national traditions, to generate sufficient opportunities for all young people to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity?

Let me also cite another example. A genuine dialogue between cultures and faiths could help the protagonists find their way to peace and a prosperous future. Who does not remember the bitter experience of the inter-ethnic clashes in the Balkans during the last 10 years? Ethnic cleansing or the destruction of religious sites were integral parts of these conflicts. Unfortunately, we have been witnessing them in other parts of the world, too.

These are serious warnings. Even in the age of highly sophisticated information and communication technologies, mankind is suffering from the same atavisms of the past, typical of medieval times or the Crusades. In terms of mankind's history, there is also the other side of the coin. During the period between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries, Jews, Christians and Muslims participated in flourishing examples of scientific, artistic, medical and philosophical endeavours.

It is of particular importance to stress that the dialogue among civilizations must play a crucial role in overcoming every type of fundamentalism and

integralism, as the two most obvious societal forms of intolerance, regardless of their religious roots and backgrounds.

My country, the Republic of Macedonia — being a unique incarnation of the turbulent and manifold history of the region of south-eastern Europe where Hellenic culture and Roman civilization left numerous traces; where down through the ages Christianity and Islam fought for predominance; and where Slavic, Greek, Albanian, Roman and Turkish ethnicities have been interwoven — had more than good reason to be among the sponsoring countries of resolution 55/23 on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, adopted by the General Assembly on 13 November 2000.

We welcome the activities undertaken by the personal representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, working together with the Director-General of UNESCO, along with a number of Governments and eminent persons, various civil society organizations and representatives around the world, to further the dialogue among civilizations through a series of organized manifestations, projects, gatherings, workshops, conferences and other events.

The Salzburg dialogue among civilizations, a new paradigm of international relations to be continued next year; the Vilnius International Conference on Dialogue among Civilizations and the Declaration adopted on that occasion; the International Conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations in Tokyo and Kyoto; the International Seminar and the Tehran Declaration on Environment, Religion and Culture adopted on that occasion; the twenty-first century forum-symposium on dialogue among civilizations held in Beijing are a few examples.

In accordance with the programme of action within the global agenda for dialogue among civilizations envisaged in draft resolution A/56/L.3, the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Mr. Boris Trajkovski, intends to undertake an initiative to host a conference or seminar on dialogue among civilizations, in the framework of UNESCO, in the year 2002 in Ohrid, Macedonia.

In view of the follow-up measures, as well as the prospect of dialogue among civilizations, we must give special attention to the work of the Group of Eminent Persons established by the Secretary-General, which has completed its work. The authors have embarked upon a daring mission focusing on the elaboration of a new paradigm of international relations. The reassessment of the concept of enemy, alignments based on issues rather than ideology, the concept of stakeholders and, finally, the decision-making system based on equal footing and individual responsibilities are certainly crystallizing this new paradigm. Not only does the intellectual endeavour of the Group deserve our full respect, but we also respect it for making the dialogue a more than attractive field of discussion.

The basic values and principles of a multipolar and interdependent world differ substantially from the one in which the United Nations was created. A unilateral implementation of the concept of enemy, or alignments based on issues according to the new paradigm, would require a reconsideration of the United Nations Charter or, at least, of some of its basic principles. To conduct a dialogue along these lines would not only engender a new paradigm of international relations, but would also imply the breaking of a taboo when it comes to the grass roots of our Organization. On the other hand, one could rightly pose the question: Are we really eager to make the United Nations a permissive Organization, bearing in mind the clear commitment enunciated and underlined in the Millennium Declaration to principles that have proved timeless and universal?

In terms of the goal of dialogue, the ongoing discussion concerning the equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council may be the most convincing landmark. It shows that building something together takes time and requires stamina, determination, courage and wisdom, thus becoming at the end of the day the real form of dialogue.

Let me conclude by stressing that, eventually, we all have to strive for inner courage and wisdom to help design an inclusive world in which diversity is perceived no longer as a threat, but as an element of progress in the growth of our civilization.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to convey the feelings of the State of Qatar regarding this debate on the dialogue among civilizations.

This is a timely debate, given current conditions in the world. It is timely not only because of the new millennium that has just begun — a new era in which we had hoped there would be an increase in

understanding and awareness — but because of the violence that is affecting most of the world. The previous century may have been one of the bloodiest in history. The new century has begun with some of the most violent events imaginable.

The new millennium is suddenly reflecting the familiar face of violence, hatred and anger. Is it not time for policy makers in this culturally, technologically and scientifically advanced era to study thoroughly the essential elements of the concept of culture, civilization and dialogue, and to acknowledge that such elements represent security and peace for people throughout the world today?

There is an urgent need for humankind to ensure moral solidarity at the global level, and for dialogue among civilizations to be accepted by all peoples as a means of understanding their common cultural, social and religious values. Such moral values are, in their turn, the foundation of human solidarity. They will enable us to better understand the basic causes that force human beings to inflict pain and suffering on their brothers and sisters.

In the context of such human solidarity and the need to identify a global vision based on international humanitarian law and respect for human rights, this dialogue can help to resolve conflict among all human beings, whether individuals or groups. Unfortunately, despite our cultures, technological resources and tolerant religions, the world today is faced with many more problems than it has solutions.

We need a long-term vision and policies to help us to tackle the new conditions in the world. Today, many countries are being torn apart by armed conflict, extreme poverty and disease. Given the tragic circumstances surrounding us, therefore, how can we undertake a dialogue among civilizations?

We need to begin such a dialogue if we are to face up to contemporary challenges such as terrorism and its causes. We need to lay the groundwork to enable future generations to develop a positive vision, to tackle existing conflicts and make dialogue among peoples our priority.

Do we need war, conflict and terrorism, including State terrorism, to remind us of this? We must defend peace. And we must make every effort to create peace, instead of just maintaining it. We must prevent crises before they occur. It is up to us now to promote a dialogue among civilizations, to establish a culture of peace and to learn, first and foremost, to live in peace with ourselves and with one another so that we can tackle threats to peace and prosperity throughout the world.

The recent terrorist attacks and their negative consequences for international human and religious relations remind us of what was believed in the 1990s regarding a clash among civilizations. We must therefore pursue dialogue among civilizations and ensure interaction between different cultures so that concepts can be better analysed and harmonized and we can reaffirm the values that certain extremists are trying to keep us from sharing. This meeting has acquired special importance since terrorism as a global phenomenon and a political movement has been attached to Muslims and Arabs, who have become the favourite guilty party in the eyes of the West. All we need to do is consider the information in the Arab and other media to become aware of the fact that third world countries are being pushed to total paralysis. The world — particularly the Arab and Islamic world — is faced with an intensification of the conflict of civilizations from the religious and ethnic point of view.

Global appeals for a cultural dialogue among civilizations are becoming stronger. The United States could become a leader of such a dialogue, because it is a country of great cultural diversity and could set an example in the area of social coexistence.

The State of Qatar will not be party to conflicts between civilizations, religions and ethnic groups.

The General Assembly should play a leading role in supporting human solidarity and promoting dialogue among civilizations and peoples for the benefit of international peace and security. Islam considers murder to be an abominable crime and has encouraged dialogue between civilizations and religions. We need to undertake dialogue to resolve crises, ensure that justice reigns and avoid condemning particular ethnic groups, nationalities or religions.

The Islamic religion tells us not to resort to terrorism and not to kill human beings unjustly. Such acts have nothing whatever to do with religion or nationalities. We must support the principle of dialogue among civilizations and the underlying principles of international law and human rights. These are principles shared by all peoples and civilizations.

We live in a united, though multidimensional, world of different cultures and nationalities. The Governments that do not heed their people will not be successful. That is why we must listen to the voices of our citizens, the voices of the people, whether through civil society, non-regional or non-governmental organizations or through the United Nations system.

The terrorists who have spread death and destruction do not share our view of the world. They are filled with hatred and do not represent any religion or any nationality; they represent only themselves and their narrow political causes.

The international community should ask itself whether it has properly protected its patrimony of wisdom, experience and duties. We must save humankind from the evil that it has created, and we must look to history to learn lessons. We must safeguard the resources that we will leave to future generations, particularly the need to respect international moral and legal criteria and the principle of dialogue among civilizations, ensuring that such dialogue replaces the conflict among civilizations and the future becomes the age of reason, wisdom, peace and security.

Improvements in communications systems have brought major advantages for all future generations because they enable us to exchange ideas and achieve peace. Today we are in a unique position to expand the dialogue so that it can become a genuine dialogue among civilizations throughout the world.

Information technology and progress in means of communication and transportation have made the dialogue among civilizations a necessity in our world. Globalization will be welcomed as a positive process once all peoples and civilizations are involved in dialogue rather than confrontation.

The cold war and the decades-long conflict between the East and West have come to an end. But suddenly we are faced with another type of conflict: the conflict between the East and West, some say, will be replaced by a conflict between the North and the South and between the rich and the poor. This is why we must avoid at all costs an increase in conflict between civilizations. The dialogue among civilizations is very important if we wish to achieve the objectives of eliminating racism and racial discrimination and consolidating human rights through cooperation and understanding.

In this respect, we must remember that diversity is a source of strength and not a cause for division. As the Holy Koran says,

> "O mankind! We created
> You from a single (pair)
> Of a male and a female,
> And made you into
> Nations and tribes, that
> Ye may know each other
> (Not that ye may despise
> (Each other). Verily
> The most honoured of you
> In the sight of Allah
> Is (he who is) the most
> Righteous of you." (*The Holy Koran IL:13*)

Ignorance of the values of others or of their religions, and attitudes of supremacy and bigotry are not the view of the Koran. Almighty God created men and women to cooperate with each other and with humanity as a whole for our common benefit. This encourages us to recognize the rights of others and to appreciate their values and convictions based on justice, equality and noble principles and ideals, as well as to try to eliminate all obstacles created through misunderstandings and mutual suspicions. The dialogue must be global and allow all to participate in the creation of a culture of world peace.

Qatar, based on its domestic experience and recognizing the genuine need to create an environment favourable to an international dialogue among civilizations, fully supports the concept of a dialogue instead of a clash among civilizations. The appeal launched by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, at the round table held last year, to hold in Doha one of the three meetings of the Group of Eminent Persons led by Mr. Giandomenico Picco, Personal Representative of Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, is clear proof that the State of Qatar fully supports this concept. Indeed, the third such meeting was held in Doha on 5 September 2001.

In this respect, Qatar would like to welcome the Tehran Declaration resulting from the fifth session of the Islamic Conference of Information Ministers, held in Tehran on 1 and 2 December 1999. We also welcome the global document on dialogue among civilizations and the substantive activities undertaken by the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The second

meeting of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts responsible for preparing an Executive Work Programme on Dialogue among Civilizations was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on 23-25 September 2000. We have also supported the global document for dialogue among civilizations and the draft Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations.

The dialogue we aspire to should be an open one involving all civilizations without exception. It should be based on the attempt to understand the concerns, interests and objectives of others. It should be a dialogue aimed at creating peaceful coexistence, free from all forms of racism, exclusion, enslavement of others or interference in the internal affairs of other States. It should include cultural divergences and differences and be aimed at creating a real future for humanity. It should be a frank and sincere dialogue that will produce understanding and tolerance and that will renounce violence, hatred and aggression. The dialogue among civilizations should also affirm the legitimacy of the purposes and principles of the United Nations, strengthen the idea of dialogues and discussions, and allow us to move forward in the area of human rights, environmental issues and other issues of concern to all of us.

We reaffirm the role of the United Nations in increasing awareness among the peoples of the world of the concept of a dialogue among civilizations in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan): The dialogue among civilizations is a unique item on our agenda. In fact, we are of the view that in many ways the entire range of discussions and interactions within the United Nations family between different peoples, cultures and ways of life also constitute part of such a dialogue.

In my view, most of the effort and work of the United Nations should have the objective of pursuing peace and security through the non-violent resolution of disputes, no matter how difficult they may seem. These efforts should also contribute to promoting tolerance and understanding among races, religions and cultures. Above all, the objective should be to accomplish peaceful coexistence among nations, peoples and their respective civilizations.

Whether we talk about a dialogue among nations or civilizations, there has to be a basic premise and understanding from which we can continue such an interaction. How could we describe such a premise?

First, in our view, all civilizations taking part in such a dialogue have to subscribe to and faithfully practise the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, especially in their dealings with each other. This would mean that they exercise utmost tolerance, whether in respect of race, colour, religion or levels of socio-economic development. They must consider each other equals and equal partners on this planet and, above all, decide to interact with the objective of living in peace with each other.

History has shown us that peoples have gone to war in attempts to wipe out or dominate each other in the name of religion and civilization. Some have taken such a course simply to conquer territory. The colonization of peoples and their lands, the enslavement and exploitation of people of other races and colour, and conflicts over political ideology and religion have all led only to gross injustice, suffering, violence and terrorism.

A great awareness dawned after the Second World War, when nations emerging from the ashes of the death and destruction wrought by increasingly modern weapons decided to establish the United Nations, in order "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Unfortunately, we are still some way from achieving this laudable goal.

If one race, religion or culture considers itself superior to another, and perhaps even harbours hatred and the intention of destroying the other, if it has a "we-versus-them" attitude, there simply cannot be a genuine and peaceful dialogue. This would lead not to a dialogue between civilizations but to a clash of civilizations.

It is my understanding that civilization arises out of human evolution, through the acquisition of higher values, knowledge and the experience over centuries by peoples of diverse races and religions. It also consists of the experience gained through dealings between civilizations as well as the ironing out of differences and the smoothing over of rough spots. Rarely does civilization emerge in a state of total isolation.

Hence civilizations and their beliefs and practices cannot be expected to remain static. Civilizations must be dynamic. Long-held views and beliefs, however dear or final they may seem to us, sometimes are not

tenable in the context of today's global village. Practices that harm others and that stunt the full potential of individuals, including one's own people, and belligerent views that give rise to conflicts have to be changed or abandoned, so that all can live in peace and cooperate to achieve common human goals.

In conclusion, I reiterate that peaceful coexistence can be achieved only when civilizations learn to adapt to changing times, peacefully to resolve differences with others, and give up violence, terrorism and warfare. As we witness what is happening in the world around us, we can see that we still have to learn how to live peacefully with each other. The terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September and the developments in Afghanistan have made this glaringly clear.

It is hoped that this dialogue will bring to the fore issues that need to be looked at more closely by the international community and that it will lead to peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

In our view, this should be the ultimate objective of the dialogue among civilizations.

Mr. Hønningstad (Norway): This dialogue among civilizations aims to encourage interaction, in its most diverse sense, among and within countries, nations, cultures and religions. This is an excellent way of promoting pluralism and tolerance, as well as the participation of civil society in processes of governance.

Technology, migration and integration are bringing people of different races, cultures and ethnicities closer together, breaking down old barriers and creating new realities. The ongoing process of globalization entails an intensified intercultural interchange. At the same time, today's communication opportunities present a tremendous challenge for us, in terms of increasing our ability both to understand and to make ourselves understood.

We would like to stress that the dialogue must also encompass indigenous peoples and cultures. In this regard, dialogue among civilizations should also become a vehicle to promote and ensure the enjoyment by indigenous peoples of their rights, in concert with the indigenous peoples themselves.

Alongside the world's rich variety of civilizations, cultures and groups, there is a global civilization based on the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which we are all called on to defend and promote. This global civilization can thus be characterized by its insistence on universal human rights and freedoms, its tolerance of dissent, and its belief in the right of individuals everywhere to have a say in how they are governed. It is a civilization based on the belief that diversity is something to be celebrated, not feared. Indeed, many conflicts are fuelled by people's fear of those who are different. Only through dialogue can such fears be overcome.

It is our belief that the concept of dialogue among civilizations naturally and logically leads to an affirmation of a value that increasingly unites us all: the universality of human rights. The United Nations itself has done a great deal to establish a culture of dialogue, and the world community has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to a shared existing ethical foundation. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that Governments have the primary responsibility for ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This year has been designated as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Norway welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the prospect of dialogue among civilizations and the activities pertaining to the Year, as well as all the preparations and concrete initiatives that have already taken place and those that are planned. We note with satisfaction the work undertaken by Mr. Giandomenico Picco as personal representative of the Secretary-General.

Dialogue can help us distinguish lies from facts, and propaganda from sound analysis. In the light of the attacks against the United States on 11 September, the need for global dialogue and an international commitment against terrorism must lie at the heart of all our activities. Terrorism transcends national borders. It strikes at the core of the values that we hold to be universal and independent of our cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations. Like the people of New York, who stand united in grief, bravery, and determination, so must we, the international community, stand united in confronting international terrorism.

We must stand firm in rejecting any threat against the United Nations, the main meeting place for dialogue in the world. As the concept of a dialogue

among civilizations must be based on the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, the fundamental challenge for us as Members of the United Nations is to strive for peace and security while never tolerating terrorist attempts to destabilize the global values represented by this Organization.

Mr. Navarrete (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation would like to convey its gratitude to the Secretary-General, to his personal representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and to the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, both for the submission of the various reports and documents which are enriching our debate today and for the personal and institutional commitment that they have demonstrated in promoting a lofty and relevant initiative: the promotion of a dialogue and of understanding among civilizations.

We are also grateful to the enlightened Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for having proposed the introduction of this very important topic for discussion, as well as for having initiated consideration of a draft resolution, the broad sponsorship of which augurs well for its adoption by consensus.

The atrocious terrorist acts of 11 September and their consequences for the political and economic areas and for international peace and security, among others, make it even more urgent to make dialogue a constant, permanent and favoured tool in attempting to resolve the differences arising out of our diversity at all levels: local, national, bilateral, regional and global.

The subject that we are examining today, complex in itself, includes both directly and indirectly concepts, such as culture and civilization, that are distinguished by their changeability, evolution and diversity as well as by the complexity of their interactions.

We know that culture, in its broadest sense, is everything we possess as living beings through learning from or imitating our fellow human beings. Language, food, dance, clothing and everything that we have learned form part of our culture. The term is extremely broad. There is not and cannot be a human community without culture.

Civilization is something else. The concept comes from the Latin word for city. It has two principal aspects: the mode of understanding the universe and its manifestations in art, religion, science and technology, among others; and the mode of social organization, especially the State and laws. To civilize means to subject to reason, to apply the rationality of thought, religion or law.

In this context, just as there is not and cannot be a human community without culture, there can be and are uncivilized communities. Where there is no rationality, there is no civilized life.

On the other hand, dialogue, or the confrontation of different positions, is the best way to clarify a problem, to shed light on what is uncertain. In this sense, Plato said thought is a dialogue with oneself; in the intimate and solitary act of exercising thought, there is a hidden dialogue. This is because thinking is tied closely to presenting arguments, explaining, giving reasons.

But it is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to understand oneself without subjecting one's own arguments to the scrutiny and objections of others. Here again we see the link between dialogue and thought. To think is to engage in dialogue.

Seen from this point of view, dialogue among civilizations is a paean to diversity and pluralism. Diversity in both the biological and human worlds is rich and creative. Diversity is life; it is, as scientists say, order. On the other hand, in the uniform and global one cannot identify what is particular and different from the rest. What makes the story of humanity fascinating is that each of us is different. The same can be said about history: each nation is different, with peculiarities that distinguish it from the rest.

Therefore, the only way in which we can enrich ourselves both spiritually and materially is to reach out to what is different — other perspectives and views. Dialogue, for its part, presupposes respect for the diversity and peculiarity of the other. It is not a matter of erasing diversity or of unifying by cancelling. Incorporating means adding together what is diverse, conserving its distinctive peculiarity as it becomes part of one common goal.

The example of Europe is illustrative. Europe was always a cauldron of cultures: an enormous diversity of peoples in a territory that was not very large. As a result, European cultures made notable progress where they lived together, next to one another. In contrast, as the Mexican writer Octavio Paz pointed out, the

greatest difficulty for the development of pre-Hispanic cultures in what is now Latin America was their total isolation and lack of dialogue with each other.

Different cultures and civilizations can understand each other only by engaging in dialogue. Understanding a civilization means nothing more than grasping it as a similar response — of the same kind but with specific differences — to the needs and ideals of the civilization known to us. In other words, dialogue means making a civilization different from ours become our own.

When dialogue fails and understanding of a different civilization does not result, we tend to view that civilization as totally different from us, and often hostile. There is not much distance between lack of understanding, hostility and conflict. Confrontation, from this point of view, is a result of the failure of mutual understanding — the breakdown of dialogue. Confrontation encompasses the desire to destroy what we cannot understand. Lack of understanding, the breakdown of dialogue and the will to destroy go hand in hand.

Proof that dialogue among civilizations is not easy can be found by looking at human history as a whole. Conflict and war between various groups have perhaps been more common and frequent than peace and harmony.

The perpetual peace of which Immanuel Kant spoke remains an ideal to be attained. If there is human moral progress — which, despite everything, seems certain — it should be reflected primarily in the effort to understand, through dialogue, cultures and civilizations different from ours that appear before us.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to express its full agreement with the observation, contained in the Secretary-General's report, that cultural and religious diversity is a source of strength and not a cause of division and conflict. My delegation also shares the belief that the United Nations — this forum — continues to be the natural place for the dialogue among civilizations, the forum where that dialogue can flourish, be fruitful and help achieve the objectives of maintaining peace and promoting human development.

Mr. Lancry (Israel) (*spoke in French*): In this General Assembly discussion devoted to the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, I thought it appropriate to include in my statement a brief introduction in Arabic.

Of course, my mastery of classical Arabic will forever remain imperfect. Having acquired the rudiments of this language during my Moroccan adolescence, I am trying, at the United Nations, to update the distant echoes that carry the magic of yesteryear back to me. Therefore, in tribute to the language of my youth, I have decided to include this fragment in Arabic as a miniature illustration of our discussion.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I wish to begin my statement in Arabic as an expression of the dialogue between cultures and civilizations. In my country, the Arabic language is considered the second official language.

I consider myself fortunate to be able to read and write in the beautiful Arabic language, but unfortunately that is not enough. My effort to learn Arabic is one of the incentives for contact with and respect for this language, which is part of my culture, as I was born in Morocco.

I am fully confident that the dialogue among languages and cultures in our region will help create the necessary language of peace, not only to achieve political peace, but also to sow reconciliation and coexistence among the peoples of the region. As the saying goes, by spreading one people's culture to another, the stupidity of war will be avoided.

(*spoke in French*)

In our preceding statements on the dialogue among civilizations, we have, in the context of general consensus, indicated our unreserved support for, and desire to participate actively in, the dialogue.

With regard to the State of Israel, the modern incarnation of an ancient people, the shared foundations of three monotheistic religions and their scriptural, spiritual and intertextual manifestations are a generating force for dialogue and openness.

The history of humanity, based for too long on negating the other, on the supremacy claimed by a philosophy, an ideology, a race, a culture, a truth or a revelation, is a history in which man has been destroyed in the most appalling disasters.

Throughout the centuries, the implacable antagonism between civilizations, the superimposition of one culture on another, the attempts by one race to obliterate another have been tragic tendencies, a source of chaos and misfortune in our world.

On this list of disaster marked by the subjugation of man by man in the name of triumphant ideologies, some bright periods, some sustained peaks, guided humankind towards salvation. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Judeo-Arab Golden Age in medieval Spain, the thousands of years of Jews living in the Maghreb, the ancient Egypt of Joseph or that of the wise men of Alexandria, the Persia of Cyrus and Darius — dialogue and respect for diversity were the driving forces of these peak periods of our civilization.

In diversity harmoniously lived, the differences are interwoven without being nullified; they flourish, without one rising at the expense of the others. They often converge to introduce new differences. It is in these median areas that differences of cultural crossbreeding emerge, where borders transform into vibrating membranes that thwart closure and isolation. In order to intensify the dialogue among civilizations, we must cross our own mental borders, pierce our ideological walls and dig tunnels under our ramparts of inhibitions, so that the best of ourselves can first ooze and then spurt liberating words.

It is through contact with areas of cultural mixture, at the intersection of diverse areas, histories and civilizations, where dialogue and understanding are possible, that mankind is able to trace its future in peace.

In a world that is prey to isolation and Manichaean divisions such as those that produced the horror of 11 September, a living and diversified dialogue among civilizations is the antidote to fundamentalist terrorism and its nebulous carriers of death, destruction and suicidal impulse.

After the unspeakable disaster of 11 September, there is an urgent need to extend the dialogue among civilizations and promote interfaith dialogue. This is a responsibility that is incumbent first and foremost on the family of nations and on its spiritual, political and intellectual leaders. The chief Organization, the United Nations, led by a visionary Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his remarkable Personal Representative for the dialogue among civilizations, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, are useful —indeed, essential — catalysts in this vast and valuable project for our century.

Mr. Abelian (Armenia): I would like to begin by expressing to Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, my country's respect for the devotion with which he pursues the vision of a dialogue among civilizations. Our appreciation and respect also go to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for supporting this initiative and promoting it within the United Nations system.

Initiatives like the one we are addressing today appear on the international agendâ at very specific times in human history. At the threshold of the new millennium, which undoubtedly will be the millennium of human expansion into the universe, there is a growing understanding that the human race can no longer be weakened by cultural, religious and ideological differences. Such differences should instead be turned into an inexhaustible source of strength, inspiration and new ideas. A dialogue among civilizations is both a sign of mankind's maturity and an instrument for its progress.

In fact, the entire concept of a dialogue among civilizations leads us to the realization that there exists only one human civilization, which is extraordinarily rich and diverse, as exceptionally manifold as the human species itself. Therefore, a dialogue among civilizations will eventually evolve into the self-knowledge of humanity, without which the human quest for perfection will never be accomplished.

In today's world, more and more people have begun to realize that they belong to more than one civilization. Multiculturalism has become a reality, and it can grow to become a universal standard for cultural self-identification in the twenty-first century. Of course, this process should not be artificially accelerated or enforced. The unfortunate reality that several mini-cultures and micro-civilizations vanish each decade from the face of our planet, even in remote and hardly accessible regions, cannot be perceived as a necessary and unavoidable sacrifice on the altar of globalization. There are, and will be, societies and groups of people for whom cultural globalization can be, or already has been, very painful. The international community must respect the right to cultural self-determination in the same manner as the right to political self-determination. There are small ethnic groups in today's world which, despite their modest

demographics, are the living heirs of great past civilizations. Many of them are forgotten and neglected. Some are endangered in their own homelands, such as, for example, the Assyrians, who keep alive the Aramaic tongue of Jesus Christ. Such ethnic and religious groups should be regarded as the cultural heritage of all mankind, and a special approach should be taken to their needs and aspirations.

But there is opposition to dialogue of a completely different kind, which springs from a notion of cultural superiority. Calling others "inferiors", "barbarians" or "infidels" is a sign of cultural insularity, which provides fertile soil for ethnic and religious intolerance and far too often manifests itself in acts of violence and terrorism. It is regrettable that during the International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations we suffered the unspeakable horror of 11 September. This tragedy has revived the ill-fated theory about a clash among civilizations, which seems to have acquired many new adherents. The seriousness of this theory should not be underestimated. We should be honest with ourselves, and we have to admit that the clash is no less real and no less likely than the dialogue. It is a serious threat, and it is a bold challenge to the adherents to dialogue and to the United Nations itself. It is up to all of us to determine the possible course of human history. In this regard, we would like to mention the valuable contribution to the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations made by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held earlier this year in Durban, South Africa.

The lesson that we must learn today is simple: political actions and military operations can destroy training camps and terrorist infrastructures. They can bring to justice the persons responsible for crimes against humanity, but they cannot destroy completely the ideology motivating them and poisoning their minds with hatred. This is where initiatives like the dialogue among civilizations can prove to be effective. But the dialogue should not limit itself to high podiums and scientific conferences. It should find immediate and effective ways to reach out to ordinary people in the streets, who are often dangerously influenced by extreme nationalists and religious fanatics.

The concept of a dialogue among civilizations is new and still very fragile. Secretary-General Kofi Annan rightly noted that even the discussion of the dialogue among civilizations can be conducted in such a way that it actually reinforces barriers to dialogue instead of bringing them down. During the last session of the General Assembly, we already witnessed some attempts to use this agenda item for negative propagandistic purposes. We strongly reject such moves and urge all Member States to spare no efforts in preserving the original hate-free nature of this initiative.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I represent a country that may be considered a success story of interaction of cultures and civilizations. Being the heir of the great ancient civilizations of eastern Anatolia, Armenia later developed a culture that bore remarkable similarities to neighbouring Zoroastrian and Greco-Roman civilizations. A Christian nation since 301 A.D., and speaking an Indo-European language, Armenians are naturally attached to Europe culturally, spiritually and linguistically. At the same time we have a deep knowledge and understanding of the neighbouring Islamic civilization, which we have learned to respect during centuries of coexistence and active interaction. We want to confirm once again from this podium our strong commitment to the idea of a dialogue among civilizations, which promises a much better future for humanity on this small planet.

Mr. Widodo (Indonesia): Let me begin by expressing appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report in document A/56/523 and to the eminent persons who contributed to the publication of the book entitled *Crossing the Divide: Dialogue among Civilizations*. My delegation would also like to recognize the foresight of President Seyed Mohammad Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran on this initiative. Likewise, we would like to take this occasion to recognize the financial contribution that has been made by the Government of Switzerland to the trust fund established for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

The celebration of this United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and the many activities that have taken place indeed encourage us. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multilingual country, Indonesia embraces the need for tolerance and understanding through dialogue. The Year was marked by a peaceful transition of power and a further strengthening of the democratic process in Indonesia

and the beginning of a more stable era. We therefore fully subscribe to the basic principle that the necessary political will must be exercised to ensure a dialogue among the groups concerned in society and that it must be carried out at the local, national, regional and international levels. Moreover, the dialogue among civilizations should become a soft tool of diplomacy that will ultimately prove cost effective and successful in our joint efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate conflict, violence and terrorism.

Our own political problems in Aceh, the Maluccas and Irian Jaya provinces are being duly addressed through dialogue. The Government of Indonesia does encourage a free exchange of views through a free press. Various groups in our society are working together to solve the problems of globalization and economic uncertainty. Dialogue is alive and well in Indonesia.

Integral to that effort is the contribution made by non-governmental organizations in particular, and by members of civil society. It is our experience that these bodies can be effectively utilized as venues for dialogue between groups representing different constituencies and as mechanisms for building confidence and trust.

Indonesia is also of the view that it is imperative to have such a dialogue at the regional level, where it can contribute to confidence-building measures and create an atmosphere of understanding. I would recall that the Declaration of the Tehran seminar on dialogue among civilizations did emphasize, among other things, that the dialogue can enhance our mutual understanding and knowledge about different cultures, should enhance cooperation in addressing threats to global peace, security and well-being, and should enrich the promotion and protection of all human rights.

At the global level, Indonesia's commitment to the dialogue among civilizations is appropriately reflected in our co-sponsorship of the Global Agenda and its Programme of Action. The task now is to ensure that the necessary financial resources are made available for a successful implementation of the Programme.

My delegation joins others in the belief that the United Nations is the natural home of the dialogue and the only multilateral forum where it can flourish and manifest itself in genuine and concrete achievements. Through the framework of the United Nations, we are confident that the dialogue among civilizations will become the new paradigm of international relations for the twenty-first century.

Our commitment to the venue of the United Nations for this purpose is, we believe, vindicated by the tragic events of 11 September 2001. The tremendous loss of life and the subsequent unfolding events lend added importance and urgency to the role of this Organization in seeking internationally acceptable solutions to issues of peace and security and in promoting development, in full conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Indonesia will continue to contribute to the success of that effort and to the success of a dialogue among civilizations.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall continue to hear speakers in the debate on this item tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.